

# TWO ORIGINALS

Chapters 5 & 6 • Based on *The First Few Years of Marriage* by Jim Burns and Doug Fields

## THE TRANSFORMATIVE ARC OF THIS SESSION

From a **marriage trying to change each other into copies** → to a **marriage that celebrates two originals and chooses the positive**

### Anchor Scriptures

*"I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well."*  
Psalm 139:14 (NIV)

*"However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband."*  
Ephesians 5:33 (NIV)

*"A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger."*  
Proverbs 15:1 (NIV)

### How to Use This Guide

This study guide is designed for couples walking through the First Few Years of Marriage book and video series together. Each session includes Scripture for reflection, real-life stories that illustrate the principles, questions for couples discussion, and personal reflection for journaling. Work through it at your own pace. There are no wrong answers here — only honest ones.

**For best results:** Read Chapters 5 and 6 of the book, then watch Session 4 together. Open your Bibles. Then work through this guide at your own pace, saving the discussion questions for conversation with your spouse. Close with the prayer together.

### Introduction

Before the wedding, your differences were adorable. After the wedding, they can start to grate. Jim and Doug have a phrase for it: differences attract, then differences attack. Session 4 is about the two skills that decide whether your differences become a source of strength or a source of slow erosion — celebrating who your spouse actually is, and choosing a positive tone on purpose.

Most of us run some version of "Operation Change My Spouse" — the quiet project of turning the other person into a slightly better, slightly more convenient copy of ourselves. It never works, and it always wounds, because the heart pulls away from whatever rejects it. The alternative is to see your spouse as an original masterpiece, to meet their real needs for love and respect, and to keep the emotional climate positive — because, as the research shows, the happiest marriages aren't the ones without conflict. They're the ones with far more warmth than friction.

Before you dive in, take a moment to settle in. Invite God into this time. Start with one honest sentence to each other about where your marriage is today.

### To begin:

- Name one difference between you that used to be charming and now sometimes irritates you. Can you say it with a smile?

### Scripture Foundation

Before we talk about what to do, we start with what is true. These three passages anchor everything in Session 4. Read each one slowly — out loud and together if you can.

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Psalm 139:14 (NIV)

*"However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband."*  
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### Reflect

- Which of these three verses speaks most directly to where your marriage is today? Why that one?
- Psalm 139:14 says each of us is fearfully and wonderfully made. Where have you been treating one of your spouse's God-given differences as a flaw to fix instead of a design to respect?

### Two Originals

Jim and Doug make two moves in this session. First, celebrate the differences: stop running Operation Change My Spouse, trade rejection for respect, learn the love language your spouse actually receives, and meet the deep needs Emerson Eggerichs names — love for her, respect for him, like oxygen and water. Second, choose the positive: guard your tone (we feel tone stronger than we hear words), keep John Gottman's magic ratio of five positive moments to every negative one, and practice thank therapy until gratitude becomes a reflex. The two stories below are about couples who learned both.

#### A STORY TO REFLECT ON

##### The Photocopy

Scripture: Psalm 139:14

Two years in, Anika had a project she'd never have admitted to out loud. She was, quietly and persistently, trying to turn Theo into a slightly different person. A faster person. A person who answered texts within the hour, made decisions before the waiter came back, and didn't need to "think about it" before every single plan. She loved him. She just wished he were... more like her.

The campaign came out sideways — a sigh when he paused, a little dig about how long he took to order, a "must be nice" when he wanted a quiet weekend instead of brunch with eight people. None of it was cruel. All of it added up. And Theo, who was not slow at all about noticing things, had started getting quieter around her. Pulling in.

It was her sister who said it, not unkindly: "You know the stuff you complain about is the exact stuff you used to gush about, right? 'He's so steady. He really thinks before he speaks.' That was your whole thing about him." Anika sat with that. She had fallen for a steady, thoughtful man and then spent two years filing complaints that he was steady and thoughtful.

She didn't announce a big change. She just started catching herself. When the old sigh rose up, she'd swap it for a different thought on purpose: he's not slow, he's careful — and I have made some fast decisions I regret. She started saying the good parts out loud again. "I love that you don't panic." "You're the calmest person I know."

Theo started coming back. Not because he'd changed — he hadn't — but because he could feel the difference between being studied for flaws and being seen as an original. The heart pulls away from what rejects it. It leans toward what delights in it.

#### BIG IDEA

Your spouse is not a rough draft of you. They are fearfully and wonderfully made — an original, not a photocopy. The traits you're tempted to attack are usually the very ones that first attracted you.

### Reflect on the Story

- Anika was attacking the very traits that first attracted her. Which of your spouse's qualities did you fall for that you now sometimes complain about?
- "Operation Change My Spouse" sends a message of rejection. Where might your spouse be feeling studied for flaws instead of seen as an original?
- Anika swapped "he's slow" for "he's careful." What's one complaint you could deliberately re-see through "positive goggles" this week?

#### A STORY TO REFLECT ON

##### The Tone of It

Scripture: Proverbs 15:1

Marcus thought of himself as a reasonable guy. He didn't yell. He didn't call names. So he genuinely didn't understand why Renata kept shutting down on him. He'd ask a simple question — "Did you call the insurance people?" — and she'd go cold and quiet, and he'd think, what did I do?

A buddy rode along with him one afternoon and heard him on a phone call, then heard him ask Renata's question out loud as practice. The friend winced. "Man, it's not the words. It's the tone. You said 'did you call the insurance people' like she'd already failed. Like you were filing a report." Marcus started to argue and then heard it — the little blade of sarcasm he carried into almost everything, so habitual he'd stopped noticing it.

It turned out the tone wasn't really about Renata at all. Work was crushing him. He felt behind on everything, vaguely like a failure, and that low hum of self-disgust was leaking out sideways onto the person closest to him. The negativity was a heart issue wearing a marriage costume.

He tried two things from the study. First, thank therapy — every morning, before his feet hit the floor, he named a few specific things he was grateful for, several about Renata. Second, he started treating his tone like a choice instead of a weather report. When he felt the blade come up, he'd deliberately soften: "Hey — were you able to get to the insurance call? No worries either way."

Renata noticed within a week. Not because he'd solved his job or fixed his insecurity, but because a gentle answer had started turning away the wrath that used to fill their kitchen. She came back toward him, and — respected, not reported on — he softened more. The cycle that had been spiraling down started, slowly, to spiral up.

#### BIG IDEA

We feel tone stronger than we hear words. A harsh tone is usually a heart issue in disguise — and a gentle answer is a choice you can make even on the days you don't feel like it.

## Reflect on the Story

- Marcus's words were fine; his tone was the problem. When has your tone said something your words didn't mean? How did your spouse receive it?
- His negativity turned out to be a heart issue, not a spouse issue. What's really underneath your sharpest tone lately — stress, insecurity, exhaustion, something else?
- A gentle answer turned the cycle from down to up. What's one recurring exchange in your marriage where a softer tone could change everything?

## Couples Discussion Questions

These questions are designed for couples to honestly discuss. Take your time. Listen more than you speak. Be sensitive and compassionate to what your spouse is feeling.

1. Jim and Doug say differences attract, then differences attack. Which of your differences — personality, pace, preferences — has made the move from "cute" to "irritating"? Can you name it together without blame?
2. Emerson Eggerichs describes love and respect as a wife's and husband's deepest needs — like oxygen and water. Which do you most need to feel from your spouse? Which are you better at giving than receiving?
3. Gary Chapman's five love languages — words, acts of service, touch, gifts, quality time. What's your primary language? Your spouse's? Where are you fluently speaking the wrong one?
4. Tone, the authors say, is a choice, not a talent — and we feel tone stronger than we hear words. When is your tone hardest to control? What tends to be going on inside you when it slips?
5. John Gottman's magic ratio is five positive interactions for every negative one — and negatives include eye rolls and sighs, not just words. Honestly, where does your ratio sit right now? What would move it?
6. The vital question is "Does this really matter?" What's one piece of "small stuff" you've been treating like big stuff? What would it free up to let it go?

## Personal Reflection

Set aside fifteen quiet minutes this week. Find a pen and a place where you won't be interrupted. Sit with these questions and write whatever comes — unfiltered, unpolished.

- Finish this sentence: "The difference in my spouse I most need to start respecting instead of fixing is..."
- Finish this sentence: "When my tone goes sharp, what's usually really going on inside me is..."
- Start your own "thank therapy": list as many specific reasons as you can to be grateful for your spouse. Aim for twenty.
- What is one small course correction — doable this week — to celebrate a difference, speak a love language, or soften your tone?

## A Prayer

*God, You made us two originals — not by accident, but by design. Forgive us for the quiet projects to change each other into copies. Forgive us for the sighs and the sarcasm, for the tone that says more than we mean. Help us trade rejection for respect. Help us love and be loved in the language the other actually receives. Teach us to choose the gentle answer, to keep five kind moments for every hard one, and to put on the positive goggles again each morning. Make us grateful — because it is nearly impossible to be grateful and bitter at the same time. We trust You with our marriage. Amen.*